

Senate Panel Votes Restraint On Taps in U.S.

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The Senate Judiciary Committee approved a bill yesterday to require the government to get a judicial warrant to use wiretaps or other electronic surveillance in gathering foreign intelligence in the United States.

The bill, approved by a 6-to-3 vote, now goes to the Senate Intelligence Committee for further consideration.

Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.), who introduced the bill with the support of the Carter administration, said it improves on similar legislation approved by the committee last year but never acted on by the Senate.

Most importantly, he said, it eliminates a disclaimer that the legislation had no effect on whatever inherent power a President has under the Constitution to order wiretaps to obtain foreign intelligence information essential to the national security.

Instead, he said, the legislation provides that the procedures it establishes "shall be the exclusive means" for conducting such electronic surveillance in the United States.

The bill calls for the Chief Justice of the United States to designate seven U.S. District Court judges to whom the Attorney General may apply for a warrant to wiretap in foreign intelligence investigations.

The ban on warrantless wiretaps would not apply to overseas surveillance, but if the government wanted to wiretap a foreign embassy here, for example, the legislation would require it to obtain court approval.